

REMARKS

The Office Action dated December 16, 2005, has been reviewed in detail along with all references made of record. Reconsideration of the claims of the instant application is respectfully requested in view of the following remarks.

Applicants would like to extend their appreciation to the Examiner for the time and attention accorded this case. As will be set forth in detail herebelow, the issues raised by the Office in the outstanding Office Action, when reconsidered in light of the foregoing amendments and the following comments, should be resolved in Applicants' favor.

As of the mailing date of the outstanding Office Action, Claims 1-31 were on file, with Claims 14 and 27-31 having been withdrawn from consideration by the Office. By this Amendment, Claims 1, 2, 6 and 27-31 have been cancelled without prejudice, while Claims 3-5 have been amended. Applicants reserve the right to pursue one or more of the cancelled claims, or to pursue other claim coverage, via one or more continuing applications under 35 U.S.C. 120.

The Office indicated that Claim 26 is allowed, while that Claims 3-5 and 7-25 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. By this Amendment, Claims 3-5 have each been rewritten in independent form to contain the subject matter of base Claim 1 (there being no intervening claims in each case).

On the other hand, Claim 7 is already independent; therefore, it and Claims 8-25 dependent therefrom remain unchanged. Claim 14, indicated as "withdrawn" in the Office Action Summary, was also indicated by the Office as containing allowable subject matter. As such, Applicants acknowledge the apparent position of the Office that Claim 14 is now "reinstated" since it depends from "generic", and now allowable, Claim 7.

Claims 1, 2 and 6 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102 in view of Urda et al. In view of the cancellation of these claims without prejudice, the present rejection is obviated. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the present rejection are hereby respectfully requested.

The Abstract, as filed, contains 147 words, which clearly satisfies 37 C.F.R. 1.72. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the objection to the Abstract are thus hereby respectfully requested.

References Made of Record but not Applied:

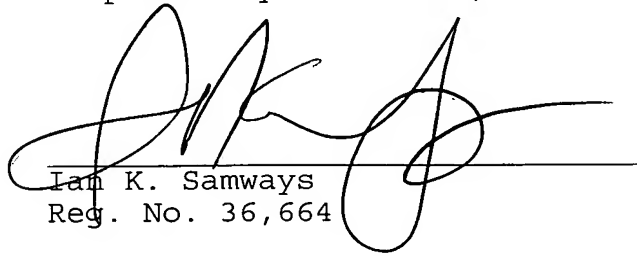
The references made of record but not applied against the claims have been reviewed. Applicants acknowledge that the Office has deemed such references not sufficiently relevant to have been relied upon in the outstanding Office Action. However, to the extent that the Office may apply such references against the claims in the future, Applicants are prepared to fully respond thereto.

* * *

In summary, Applicants respectfully submit that the instant application, including Claims 3-5 and 7-26, is presently in condition for allowance. Notice to the effect is hereby earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: February 28, 2006



Ian K. Samways
Reg. No. 36,664

Reed Smith LLP
P.O. Box 488
Pittsburgh, PA 15230
(412) 288-4160

Agent for Applicants